

Caffeine, Smoking, Alcohol, Drugs and Breastfeeding

Can I Breastfeed if I Take Medication?

Most medications, including most antibiotics, are safe to use. But some – including some herbal products and anything containing codeine, like Tylenol 3 – can harm your baby.

If you take or are considering medication

Check with your pharmacist or health care provider or talk with a HealthLink BC pharmacist at 8-1-1 to learn if any medication, herbal remedy or supplement you're currently taking or considering is safe to take while breastfeeding.

Can I Breastfeed if I Have Caffeine?

Many people have some caffeine when they're breastfeeding. But some babies are sensitive to it and may become restless or fussy – especially when they're younger.

If you have caffeine

Limit your caffeine to 300 mg per day – about 1½ mugs of coffee or 4 small cups of tea. And remember that other things – like pop, energy and sports drinks, over-the-counter medicines and chocolate – also have caffeine.

Can I Breastfeed if I Smoke Tobacco?

It's best for you and your baby if you stop smoking. But breastfeeding is still important for your baby's health, and many mothers who smoke breastfeed successfully. Breastfeeding may even help protect your baby from some of the negative effects of being exposed to tobacco smoke.

Smoking can:

- affect your milk production and let-down reflex
- make your baby fussy
- affect your baby's sleep
- put your baby at greater risk of ear infections, asthma and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) (see [Sleep](#))



DID YOU KNOW

Vaping exposes your baby to harmful chemicals like nicotine and solvents. You can still breastfeed, but can lower the risk to your baby by talking with your health care provider or calling HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

If you smoke

Reduce your baby's exposure to smoking's harmful chemicals by:

- smoking only *right after* breastfeeding
- smoking less or using a nicotine patch
- keeping your home and car smoke-free
- if you've smoked, washing your hands and changing your clothes before you hold your baby
- smoking outside only, while wearing a jacket you keep outside and only wear when you're smoking
- not bedsharing with your baby (see [Sleep](#))

For information on how to quit or reduce the amount you smoke, visit quitnow.ca, talk with your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.



Can I Breastfeed if I Drink Alcohol?

The safest choice is not to drink alcohol while breastfeeding. But moderate drinking is usually okay. For most breastfeeding parents, this means limiting alcohol to **no more than 1 alcoholic drink per day**.

Alcohol can:

- harm your baby's brain development, growth and sleep
- decrease the amount of milk you make
- decrease the amount of milk your baby will drink
- reduce the length of time you can breastfeed
- increase your baby's risk of low blood sugar
- affect your judgment and your ability to care for your baby

If you drink alcohol

If you're going to have alcohol, plan ahead as to how you're going to feed your baby. Breastfeed before you have a drink. And if you plan to have more than 1 drink, pump and store your milk to feed your baby before you have any alcohol.

After drinking, wait 2 to 3 hours *per drink* before breastfeeding or expressing milk for your baby.

Talk with your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 for more information.



BE AWARE

It takes time for your body to get rid of the alcohol in your milk. And pumping, drinking a lot of water, resting, or drinking coffee doesn't make it happen any faster. Any milk that you pump while drinking or in the 2 to 3 hours after drinking should be thrown away.

Can I Breastfeed if I Use Cannabis (Marijuana)?

Cannabis use during breastfeeding isn't advised. The THC in cannabis can stay in your milk for up to 30 days and can be passed on to your baby. And because the THC remains for so long, expressing and destroying your milk ("pumping and dumping") doesn't work to make it safe for baby, either. It's not yet known whether CBD is transferred into your milk, or what effect it might have on your baby.

Cannabis can:

- leave THC in your breastmilk for up to 30 days
- lead to issues with your child's motor development
- decrease your milk supply
- make you drowsy and unable to respond to your baby's cues

If you use cannabis

Lower the risks to you and your baby by:

- not using cannabis if you breastfeed. If you need help to quit, talk with your health care provider.
- using less cannabis, and using it less often
- not using cannabis with tobacco or other substances, or with medications
- choosing lower-potency products that have higher levels of CBD and lower levels of THC. But be aware that even CBD-only products haven't been proven safe while breastfeeding.

Can I Breastfeed if I Use Street Drugs?

Street drugs can pass through your milk and affect your baby.

If you use street drugs

Talk with a trusted health care provider, public health nurse or pharmacist, or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 to get support and information about how to safely feed your baby.



KEY TAKEAWAY

If you have more than 1 alcoholic drink per day, smoke, use cannabis or take street drugs, talk with a trusted health care provider, public health nurse or pharmacist, or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1. They can help you make the best feeding decision for your baby and offer information on ways to keep up your milk production.



DANGER

Ensure all alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, medications and street drugs are kept out of baby's reach (see [Baby Safety](#)).